

YOUR PAIN IS MY PAIN

LETTER OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE

Dear Ukrainian brothers and sisters,

For a full nine months, the absurd folly of war has been unleashed upon your land. Your skies have constantly echoed the grim sound of explosions and the alarming wail of sirens. Your cities have been hammered by bombs, as a shower of missiles has caused death, destruction and sorrow, hunger, thirst and freezing cold. Great numbers of people have taken flight into your streets, leaving behind their homes and their dear ones. Alongside the great rivers of your nation, great streams of blood and tears flow daily.

I would like to add my own tears to yours, and to assure you that I am daily close to you and bear you in my heart and in my prayers. Your pain is my pain. Today, in the cross of Jesus, I see all of you who are experiencing the terror unleashed by this aggression. Truly, the cross, the instrument of the Lord's torture, is present anew in the signs of torture found on corpses, in the mass graves discovered in different cities, and in so many other brutal images that leave us appalled and make us cry out, "Why? How can human beings treat other human beings in this way?"

I think often of the many tragic stories that I have heard, especially those involving little ones: how many children have been killed, wounded or orphaned, torn from their mothers! With you, I weep for every child killed in this war, like Kira in Odessa, like Lisa in Vinnytsia, like hundreds of other children. In each of them, our very humanity has been deeply scarred. Now they are in God's arms; they see our struggles and pray that they may soon be ended. Yet how can we fail to feel anguish for their loss and for all those others, young and old, who have been deported? The pain felt by the mothers of Ukraine is incalculable.

I think too of you, young people, who in courageous defence of your homeland have had to take up arms rather than pursue your cherished dreams for the future. I think of you, wives who have lost your husbands, gritting your teeth and quietly carrying on with dignity and determination, and making every sacrifice possible for your children. I think of you adults, who strive in every way possible to protect your dear ones; and you, the elderly, who instead of enjoying a peaceful old age have been cast into the dark night of war. I also think of you, women who were victims of violence and bear immense burdens in your heart, and of all who are pained in soul and body.

I think of you and I am close to you, with affection and admiration for the way you are facing such bitter trials.

My thoughts also turn to you, the volunteers who daily sacrifice yourselves to serve others, and to you, the pastors of God's holy people who – often at the risk of your own safety – have remained at the side of your people, offering them the consolation of God and the solidarity of their brothers and sisters. With creativity, you have turned community rooms and religious houses into shelters that provide hospitality, assistance and meals to those in difficulty. I think too of the refugees and the internally displaced, far from their homes, many of which are now destroyed. I pray for the civil authorities, who have the responsibility of governing the country in these tragic times and of taking farsighted decisions for peace and the development of the economy amid the ruin of so many vital infrastructures, both in the cities and in the countryside.

Dear brothers and sisters, in all this great flood of evil and pain – ninety years after the terrible genocide of the Holodomor – I stand in admiration of your steadfast resistance. Even amid the experience of this enormous tragedy, the Ukrainian people have never given into discouragement or self-pity. The world has come to recognize a people bold and strong, a people that suffers and prays, weeps and struggles, resists and continues to hope, a noble people of martyrs. I remain close to you in heart and prayer, with humanitarian concern that you never feel alone, that you not become inured to war, that you will not be left alone, at present but even more so in the future, when there may be a temptation to forget your sufferings.

In these months, in which bitter cold only adds to the tragedy that you are experiencing, it is my hope that the affection of the Church, the power of prayer and the love of so many of your brothers and sisters throughout the world be so many caresses on your face. In a few weeks, Christmas will be here, and the harshness of your sufferings will be all the more deeply felt. I would like to return with you to Bethlehem, to the troubles the Holy Family had to face on that cold and dark night. Yet a light arrived: not from men but from God, not from earth but from heaven.

May Our Lady, the Lord's Mother and our own, watch over you. To her Immaculate Heart, in union with the bishops of the world, I have consecrated the Church and all humanity, and particularly your own country and Russia. To her maternal heart I now commend your sufferings and your tears. From Mary, who as a great son of your land once wrote "brought God into our world", let us never tire of imploring the anxiously-awaited gift of peace, in the sure knowledge that "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37). May he grant fulfilment to the rightful aspirations of your hearts, heal your wounds and bestow his consolation upon you. I am with you, I pray for you and I ask you to pray for me.

May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 24 November 2022